Cultural Diversity of Discourse: Facilitate Coexistence and Harmony

话语与和谐文化构建

Edited by

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1 East Meets West: On the Way to Language

Wu Zongjie

Zhejiang University, P.R. China

With the progress of modernization of the Chinese society starting from early 20th century, the Chinese language in terms of discourse has experienced a fundamental change which meanwhile has transformed the mode of Chinese people's social life. "Within less than one hundred years, the Chinese language absorbed, or indeed 'devoured', the nomenclatures of the most diverse branches of Western knowledge" (Lackner 2001:2). Modern Chinese discourses, no matter whether of social or scientific practices or on China's intellectual and cultural heritage, are articulated to a large extent in Westernized discourses that were normalized as their own. By saying so, we are not only referring to the fact that modern Chinese language fills up with new terms translated from the West and that the syntactical structure is appropriated for assimilating the particularities of Western-derived notions, but more importantly to the fact that the ways of doing things with words have been fundamentally changed. The discursive practices in law, media, education, government, management, business and organization etc. were to a large degree introduced or imagined from the West. With the distance created by the history and space, people lose the memory of when, where and for what reasons such a discourse was imported, and what is the social force that enacted such a process. Chinese people may take it for granted that the language they speak and write is the language of their own without being aware that others' discourse has taken on a fundamental and deep significance in the formation of Chinese social life.

1. Authentic roots of Chinese language

A question arises from comparisons of Eastern and Western philosophies: Why was a philosopher (e.g. Heidegger) who lived in the 20th century in a highly "civilised" Western country puzzled by the same question (probably the same answer) that had occupied a philosopher (e.g. Zhuangzi, Confucius) who lived in a world of more than two thousand years ago in China? For instance, Heidegger's thinking on Being and man is comparable to and even influenced by "Tao" and Taoist understanding of the essence of man (张祥龙 1996). If this question is worth asking, then I have to understand why today's Chinese people have to learn

Western knowledge, and why our educational texts should be filled with Westernised words, which sometimes merely serve the function of a commentary on what our ancestors have already understood. The traditional Chinese culture does not lack thinking and understanding (or fundamental concern for human being), but it is short of the language of abstract, which is featured by terms such as meaning, concept, notion, truth, knowledge or ideology. In the West, truth is the destination of knowing, while in ancient China, the way of course (Tao) is the focus of inquiry. All Chinese thoughts held the concept of Tao in common (Weber 1951: 180). Plato's language about definitions, meanings, and truth is held to formulate the problems of object and his theory-solution based on the same abstract forms of language. But in the ancient Chinese text, we cannot find a word to stand for "knowledge", but only a word standing for "know" or "wisdom". Such a difference lies in the different interest that dominates knowing. According to Hansen (1983:55), the Westerner is interested in explanation; ancient Chinese is interested in social activism. "Hence, instead of asking if a philosophical claim was true, Chinese philosophers asked if it was assertable."

> Our conclusion is simply that it should not be taken as unreasonable or lacking in philosophical depth that Chinese thinkers never developed theories of abstract entities like ideas, concepts, or universals. These kinds of theories, either in ontology, semantics, philosophy of mind, or theory of knowledge (epistemology), are motivated and stimulated by features of language which divide the Chinese family of languages from the Indo-European family. Since philosophical questions are generated out of our ordinary ways of speaking and writing, we can expect that the different forms in which philosophical questions are posed will push theorization in different directions. It is not that abstract theories are impossible for Chinese; it is only that they are not necessary. (Hansen 1983:53)

Why was such a kind of language not necessary in the ancient Chinese life? Language represents forms of life. The language that distinguishes object and subject, spirit and appearance is dominated by the interest in the means to conquer nature and self or others through knowing, while the ancient Chinese were interested in how to fit in human beings harmoniously with nature (天人合一). "Confucian rationalism meant rational adjustment to the world; Puritan rationalism meant rational mastery of the world." (Weber 1951:248) Max Weber, in his explanation of the nature of Confucianism has the following:

> The cosmic orders of the world were considered fixed and inviolate and the orders of society were but a special case of this. The great spirits of the cosmic orders obviously desired only the happiness of the world and especially the happiness of man. The same applied to the orders of society. The "happy" tranquillity of the empire and the equilibrium of the soul should and could be attained only if man fitted himself into the internally harmonious cosmos. (Weber 1951:153)

Cosmic order is not rational or logical but aesthetic (Hall 1991:703). It provides a unique model of thinking whose subject matter cannot be discussed in terms of concepts, regularities or logics. Cosmological entities are thought to the extent that we give up the distinction between them by appeal to the unity of being shared by all beings. Any disturbance of this unity is thought to bring disasters to human beings. In the late 19th century, the rebels of the Boxer Rising destroyed the industry chimneys and railways introduced from the West in the belief that they were the source of a series of catastrophes in China by breaking *fengshui*. We cannot justify such an action with any scientific reason, but amazingly it is, by sheer coincidence, similar to today's Green Peace movement. Between these two parties, there is an agreement of life, but no agreement of reason①. However, such an agreement would settle any disputes in language or reason. Weber has the following to justify such a model of thinking.

> We stand before the natural order and think that it must have some "last word" to say about
> its "meaning", either to the analytic thinker or to the contemplative who gazes upon the
> whole and is stirred by its beauty. The tragedy is, as Dilthey has sometimes remarked,
> that "Nature" either has no such "last word" to divulge or does not see itself as in a
> position to do so. Very often, something similar is true of the belief that someone who
> remains silent out of good taste must have much to conceal. (Runciman 1978:202)

For Confucius, such harmony was achieved by symbolic practices of conventional ceremonies and rituals (*li*), whose meaning tends often to be no longer clear even to those who have grown up in them. He was not interested in creating rituals based on reasoning process of justification of a particular order of social structure. Rather he committed to recover *li* from the traditions. A "law" (or social order) was thus practised without argument, judgment, and punishment. It was taken simply without propositional assertion:

> The Master said "I should like to do without speech". Zi Kong said "If you do not speak,
> what message will your disciples have from you?" "Does Heaven speak?" he said. The four
> seasons proceed by it, the hundred things are generated by it. Does Heaven speak?"
> (Confucius 1998:17/19)

It appears that Confucius and Weber talk about the same thing, but they use different language. In Confucius' words, we cannot find abstract terms for propositional knowledge, which is thought to be the explanation why in ancient China, there is no predictable juridical system, legal thought and natural science (Weber 1951:150). I could argue that truth in Confucian philosophy "is not understood as the horizon of an indefinite series of investigations,

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① In Wittgenstein's terms (1970:241), agreement is required not only in definitions but also in forms of life, and this is "not agreement in opinions but in form of life". A form of life is a shared way of acting, and this is our ultimate basis for any language justification.

nor as conquest and intellectual possession of being. It is rather a treasure scattered about in human life prior to all philosophy and not divided among doctrines" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 133). When we live harmoniously with nature, we live in truth even without a need to claim it.

In establishing a cosmological relationship between language and human beings, ancient Chinese thinkers developed a deep scepticism of the efficacy of language. Laozi advocated abandoning language altogether. The very first line of *Dao De Jing* (《道德经》)reads, "Tie Dao that can be spoken is not the eternal Dao." Another line reads, "Those who speak do not know; those who know do not speak." Zhuangzi also showed his profound understanding of the problems and paradoxes of language. For him, human language has no difference from birds' chirping, mere sounds. "It is supposed to be different from the chirping of small birds. Is it really different or is it not, as a matter of fact?" (庄周 1988:16) For Zhuangzi, words do say something, but what they say change all the time and cannot be fixed with certainty.

2. East meets West in a battle of language

In the mid 19th century, China was forced to open its door at the Western gunpoints. Since then China has undergone an extraordinary change in the form of ordinary people's life and in its social structure. Its traditional cultural integrity gradually collapsed in the process of modernisation and rationalisation. This process was first initiated by the force of materials and then realised by the power of language. The intellectual revolution happened at the beginning of the 20th century (May Fourth Movement) ① marks the epoch of mass social rationalisation. Led by the two banners "democracy" and "science" and under the threat of colonisation by the West, Chinese people abandoned their ritual-based culture unwillingly but without regrets. Such a transition was entirely enacted by causal power, rather than a natural renewal of its cultural tradition. China was repeatedly defeated in her resistance (the wars) to the Western or Westernised powers. China must modernise to ensure her survival in a rationalised world. The inflow of Western reason, language, and ideas immediately released pervasive power that disturbed the society into a complete turmoil that lasted for nearly half a century.

The establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 represents the first triumph of the Western style of language. Thereafter one after another "language campaigns" in the forms of

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① It was regarded as the most important intellectual and cultural movement in modern Chinese history. It was ignited by Versailles Treaty in 1919 after Germany was defeated in the First World War, against the betrayal of China national interests. For the first time Chinese intellectuals abolished the classical form of written Chinese (wenyan), hitherto used for thousands of years, and started to reject the basic Chinese values and heritage in terms of Confucianism. (Gray 1990:198 – 201)

political struggles attempting to heighten people's consciousness of reasons gradually closed off the possibilities of primordial understanding. Social action was enacted according to the intelligibility of the Western discourse, and knowledge construction subscribes to course of language acquisition, and then was turned into social movements. This vicious circle from knowledge to action and action to knowledge was once articulated as the dialogical relationship of doing and knowing. The discourse logic could be summarized in this way: Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level.

It appears that the circle starts from practice, but the practice is presupposed by a notion of knowing subject regarding itself as the superiority over nature, and a necessity of ascending circulation of discourse. And thus the circle contributes to the fallenness from authentic being into a world "guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity." (Heidegger 1962:220), and "tears the understanding away from the projecting of authentic possibilities, and into the tranquillized supposition that it possesses everything, to that everything is within its reach". And "the movement of falling is characterized by turbulence" (Heidegger 1962: 223).

The turbulence once accelerated to such a high extent that people completely maintained themselves in abstract promises, and converted the promises into a kind of social being. The replacement of one discourse by another does not reverse the tendency of rationalization. Today's East under the domination of globalization looks like a giant machine. Everything that cannot be scientifically proved, profitably rewarded is regarded as useless. An incessant material pursuit accompanied with discourse renewals becomes the only meaning of life. Technology and material reproduction have entered the inner reaches of human existence, transforming the way we know, live and will.

The last 150 years of Chinese history is a history of rationalisation which was taken by blindly reading various alternative Western discourses. Chinese people learnt a bitter lesson from "reasons". But when they awaken, they find they are surrounded by a new wave of strange languages, and have to continue the learning process. Chinese language in the last hundreds of years, particularly starting from the May Fourth Movement, has been conceptualised, or abstractised by various Western ideas, whose meaning nobody knows. Those words that were absent in the traditional language such as concept, ideas, knowledge, ideology, economy, etc., now fill up today's Chinese texts. Most of the words were formulated in such a way that two characters that originally stand for concrete actions or things such as *zhi* (know) and *shi* (discriminate) are combined together to represent a Western notion (knowledge). Such a combination twists both the meaning of the original Chinese character and the meaning of the corresponding Western word.

Such a double twist makes the language more ambiguous, which, according to Heidegger, is a main source to distort understanding. Hence Laozi's book *Dao De Jing* could perhaps be misinterpreted as a book about morality since the two characters (*Dao De*) were combined to stand for the Western notion of morality. The same thing happens when we interpret the meaning of a Westernised word (both in English or in Chinese). Those terms such as *liberty*, *country*, *freedom*, *party*, etc. that stand for the basic value of Western culture could carry different meanings. Gray (1990:407) has the following explanation about the problem of the Chinese language:

> Western ideas are still expressed in words encrusted with two thousand years of Chinese associations, and often carry implicit meaning different from the terms they are used to translate; for example, the Chinese word for "politics" carries associations not of political debate and competition but of paternalistic administration; the Chinese word for "economics" is not associated with the analysis of economic laws but with executive action to maintain equity in economic life; the word for a political party means a clique, and the word for "liberalism" implies irresponsibility. Thus Western concepts have to struggle in China with the very language itself.

Even when a Chinese reads these terms in English, he/she would interpret the meaning according the Chinese equivalents. The Chinese language itself cannot be blamed for such a twist. Many modern languages have the same problem which features the discourse of modernity. Language has lost its credibility in our life. What is at issue is how such a phenomenon influences the Chinese people's understanding, particularly the education which is overwhelmingly dominated by an alien powerful language. When people are forced to act under the pressure of modernisation according to the language they do not understand either in their own life or in their tradition, they would probably struggle fiercely in the text which maintains meanings only in a referential totality. Hence reading, hearing and memorizing language would be the predominant way to make the language and themselves intelligible. Such a mode of reading leads people to the belief that everything is within their reach by reading, and every text could be understood if you concentrate yourself on the language. This is precisely the characteristic mode of Chinese education (probably the education in many dominated countries). It is misleading to ascribe such a mode of education to a particular culture or tradition. It is not because they have no faculty or tradition to be able to play a game creatively, but because they lack the sorts of the language for them to do so, a language that belongs to their life and can be used for thinking and showing understanding rather than conveying an abstract alien concept. The language that represents the Western reason existentially emerged from its own culture and enriched by the transcendental life-world, first

as a gift of ancient Greek city states, spread through Roman and Christian expansion, and finally taking shape through Enlightenment in modern Anglo-European countries. They thus have the infrastructure, the background of life for playing the game of reason comfortably and creatively. They have the confidence to be critical and to be able to undermine the problematic aspect of the game. But for Chinese students, they have no such a kind of language that mirrors their life, or no such a form of life to assign meanings to the language, at least not yet at the moment, and hence playing the game would mean grasping the referential meanings. The danger of such a superficial reading is that it could equip them physically and superficially, but completely destroy their primordial understanding (nameless, aesthetic, and authentic) which is essential to maintaining the balance of the power of reason and the power of nature. When China someday has the capacity to dominate the world in science and economics, they must understand what their ancestors have already understood: walking cautiously along the Way (*Dao*) or cosmic order which nobody has any reason to conquer. To be able to do so, they must regain the language of thinking, "the language of being" (Heidegger, 1971:54). Such a language is pointing to the nameless. What is said purports what cannot be said.

3. On the way to language

Today many Chinese people embark on a difficult task in trying to recover the authentic mode of traditional Chinese life. This authenticity cannot be discovered in the Chinese language that has already been distorted, and has lost its transparency and the capacity of knowing. Therefore the first step to rescue East from the cultural domination of Western language is to find the Way (*Dao*) back to an authentic language, and to render once more audible the voices which are buried in the deep horizon of life landscape. For the same reason, people who are on the Way to language, they have to, first of all, disturb the words they are speaking, denounce the grammatical habits of their own thinking, and resist the demands of the language "under the dictatorship of the public realm" (Heidegger 1996).

Heidegger, in his later works, explores the way to authentic language, by referring to language as the house of Being (Heidegger 1971:1996). For him, to rethink the essence of language, we must attempt to "bring language as language to language". This means to bring the essence of language to itself, to speak in language its own essence. This language does not serve for communicating as a tool or as an instrument of domination over nature or beings.

> But the essence of language is not exhausted by the fact of its being a means of communication. With this determination we do not meet with its authentic essence; rather, only one consequence of its essence it set forth. Language is not only a piece of equipment that man possesses alongside many others. Instead, it is language alone that first provides

the possibility of standing amidst the openness of entities. Only where there is language is there world. (Lafont 2000:90)

I understand authentic language in the way that it is not only capable of making differences, more importantly it can bring the differences into dialogue and unity. "Our Dasein is sustained by dialogue and its unity."(ibid) To be able to reach agreement about something, language must be previously and already shared on the basis of what we agree in "forms of life" (Wittegenstein 1970). In other words, what is expressed in language must have already been claimed by what cannot be said. Language thus serves a world-disclosing function. "Language happens authentically as... a world appears." In this world-disclosing function, language renders the world not as a conception or a systematic clarification of the world, but rather "as a way of givenness of entities", and meanwhile "language makes accessible entities as a whole. That is to say, it has a holistic structure" (Lafont 2000: 89).

To see how language of this type works, I take a short paragraph from *Huang Di's Inner Classic*(《黄帝内经》), an ancient Chinese medical monograph, one of the few classics that traditional Chinese medicine practitioners must read.

> *Yin* excess causing *yang* deficiency, *yang* excess causing *yin* deficiency; excessive *yang* generating heat, excessive *yin* generating cold; extreme cold generating heat, extreme heat generating cold.

Here *yin*(阴) and *yang*(阳) or cold and hot are not two different things in opposite. They represent a relationship of inter-generation(相生) and inter-restriction(相克). Language makes them different, but more essentially it brings them together as unity. *Yin* is the *yin* which is going to be *yang*, and *yang* is the *yang* that is going to be *yin*. We will fail if we try to find out what is purely the matter of *yin* and what is the object of *yang* in binary opposition. This language with mutual implication of absence and presence seems to be fleeting / slippery, but it can bring us truth in the life-world. "In the hollow it has been able to form." (Foucault 2002:87) Thus the significance of words does not create an object in terms of a name of disease, rather it recalls thinking, indicates it, and then withdraws all substance of itself.

In the context where authentic language such as the language of traditional Chinese medicine is used, human beings with its body and spirit, and nature (seasons, weather, plants, etc.) constitute an inseparable organic whole. They adjust themselves to the pulse of nature's dynamics. *Yin*, *yang* and the words of five basic elements(五行) (gold, wood, water, fire, and earth) which are used to explain symptoms stand as hints to the natural world itself. They are also interpreted as an inseparable whole; each inter-generates, inter-restricts and inter-transforms the other in a process of approaching balance. The words help transform individual's intuition of their life including body into "essential insight—a possibility which is

itself not to be understood as empirical but as essential possibility" (Husserl 1931:54). Words do not attempt to separate, name and explain what is seen, felt, and understood, but render it to us as the world itself in an ontological sense.

Language cannot represent the essence of life. Life exists in the nameless. Language merely brings the unspoken world into view, and leads us back to the place of living silently. It is necessary to find a language for Chinese social life that is trapped in the language battle between East and West. If Chinese will finally have its own language, then the Chinese people will have their unique forms of life which would be different from the Western people, as it happened thousands of years ago. When China is heading towards modernisation, and when globalisation is unifying the world and averaging human's understanding, what language can we hope for? This is a question rendered for further understanding.

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2　Damaged and/or Liberated?: Adorno's Aesthetic Vision of Everyday Life

Liu Hsin-I

University of the Incarnate Word, USA

What the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage of the process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own.

—Adorno (1974)

Adorno's aesthetic analysis of everyday life was presented in his critique of pseudo-culture, which is constructed by mass culture in the culture industry dominated by technical-economic reason. Employing Kant's three types of reason: pure reason, practical reason, and judgement, Adorno equated culture with aesthetics, and argued that aesthetic-cultural reason should be distinct from technical-instrumental reason. As a proponent of modernist aesthetics, Adorno believed that culture, and its aesthetic value, is one of the most important weapons human beings have against technique and its threat to the human condition. Modern art and its project of aesthetic modernism are able to negate and transcend social reality—i. e. making differences between the particular and the whole, the subjective and the objective, etc. Through this difference making in art, humans may overcome the threat of technical ability to duplicate and reproduce reality.

Nevertheless, in the works of art produced by the culture industry, "the details are over the wholeness, and no antithesis between the whole and the parts" (Horkheimer 1944:125 – 6). The result of this celebration of (technical) details and the elimination of contradictions between the objective whole and the subjective parts is that individual parts tend to "identify with" rather than "differentiate from" the (artistic) whole—the identity between the subjective and the objective. With the omission of contradictions, made possible through different techniques, the work of art erases social antagonism that could be highlighted by artistic negation (Adorno 1945:213; Cook 1996:60). Thanks to techniques in cultural reproduction, the "objectivity" of the individual work of art, in the culture industry, is no longer based upon the ensemble of contradictory parts, but upon the identity and sameness of them. Subjective contingency and objective structure in the culture industry have become one and the same; there is no more difference between "chance and planning" (Horkheimer 1944:146).

Thus, the objectivity of art, as a whole, is not dialectically completed through holistic contradictions, but "distorted through the personalization" in each work of art (Adorno 1993: 32; Jameson 1990: 123). The distorted completion of technical details tends to replace the wholeness of artistic totality in a true work of art, which results in the former being perceived as a totality, a whole (Adorno 1945: 213). This reconciliation between the whole and its parts, the general and the particular, brings about, not only the false objectivity of art, but also of reality, which increases the degree of people's delusion. In this age of mechanical-technical reproduction, social reality is equated with and replaced by cultural illusion.

Furthermore, the work of art in the culture industry is inscribed in commodity economy. Because culture is now a business, the process of its reproduction shares "similar ideologies and mental forces" with other industries. Just like other capitalistic industries, the major consideration in the production of cultural commodities has become economic rather than aesthetic. This economic rationality and monopoly, along with its technical counterpart, has invaded cultural production and replaced its aesthetic content with economic form—profit motive (Adorno 1975: 13). The plots in the culture industry are no longer important, because they all are "manifestations of invested capital" (Horkheimer 1944: 124). The various cultural strategies and practices are indirectly, if not directly, in the service of capital, and contribute to the identical mass culture. The characteristics of instrumental rationality—the choice of means determines the nature of ends—takes the place of aesthetic reason—"the purposefulness without purpose"—and turns reason to socio-economic purposes.

In this way, the culture industry externalizes the internal structure of art, and turns its internal use-value to external exchange-value. The exchange-value in cultural goods, as Adorno (1982: 279) saw it, "deceptively takes over the function of use-value." Works of art have become commodities. This externalization transforms the internal structure of art, in which humans may be liberated from the province of utility, and brings art back to the arena of practical use (Horkheimer 1944: 158). This secondary use of objects—what Aristotle called exchange value—prevails over aesthetics and transforms objects of art into products for consumption and commodity-fetishism (Cook 1996: 28). Art has lost its transcendence over reality and has become a part of economic processes. In doing so, art renounces its autonomy, and constitutes itself as a paradoxical commodity that includes both use and exchange values. As Adorno eloquently put it, culture is so "subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used" (Horkheimer 1944: 161).

In addition to its contribution to capitalistic technical and economic reproduction, the culture industry also "classifies, organizes and labels consumers", and plays the role of "social

markers" (Cook 1996:31). According to Adorno, culture in the culture industry "contains schematization and process of cataloguing and classification", by which culture "divides" and "differentiates" mass consumers into "individuals" (Horkheimer 1944: 131). Cultural consumption, another strategy of division and conquest, is not based upon sameness, but upon differences. The culture industry is not a mass of undifferentiated consumers with the indistinguishable faces and similar tastes.

On the contrary, the culture industry always depends upon uniqueness and distinction and so constructs individually differentiated consumers. For Adorno, the culture industry always involves both standardization in production and differentiation in consumption. The former process erases social antagonisms and boundaries in cultural production, and produces similar cultural commodities for consumption. By contrast, the latter process relies upon consumers with distinct characteristics (Cook 1996:42). The social significance of the culture industry is in its role of "unity-in-differences". On the one hand, the culture industry consists of similar products made possible by economic and technical logics. On the other hand, it also involves differentiated consumers constructed by its own cultural classification and other socio-culturally stratified distinctions. The culture industry as a socio-cultural site unifies different consumers in the consumption of similar products, through which social hierarchies are constituted and preserved, while simultaneously aesthetic hierarchies are erased. In the culture industry, cultural classification and differentiation has become a strategy to serve socio-economic purposes, social stratification is reproduced when culture is turned into "status symbols" (Adorno 1993:27). In contrast to early capitalism, in which individuals reproduce themselves through economic reproduction, late capitalism maintains its socially hierarchical integration through cultural reproduction, which is concretized in individuals (Cook 1996:9). Put it another way, one of the most significant effects of cultural differentiation and classification in the culture industry is the effect of individualization.

According to Adorno, a characteristic result of the culture industry, especially television, is the establishment of a community of socially isolated individuals, which involves both "communication and isolation" (Horkheimer 1944:221; Adorno 1993:34). On one hand, along with ontological isolation of the individual (household), the culture industry produces an audience member who feels that the radio or the television is playing only for him or her (Adorno 1945:212). This kind of "atomistic" listening or viewing constitutes the most important socio-cultural trait of the culture industry: making the connections between consumers and the culture industry, individualized. However, "the liquidation of the individual", as Adorno ironically wrote, "is the real signature of the new musical situation" (Adorno 1982:276). On the other hand, in phenomenology's terms, the culture industry's